Castro's Sister Flees, Blasts 'Island Prison'

From News Dispatches

MEXICO CITY, June 30 Cuban exiles today hailed 31-year-old Juana Castro as a heroine. The sister of Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro defected to the West because she felt Cuba had become an island prison.

At a news conference here she said she fled Cuba for her life six days ago and is seeking political asylum in Mexico until she can return to a free island. She would give no details of her escape.

The tall brunette, who said she had been active in the anti-Castro underground for the past four years, described Cuba as an immense prison surrounded by water. "My brothers (Fidel and Armed Forces Minister Raul Castro) delivered it to Russian imperialism in mid-1960. It is nailed to a cross of torment imposed by international communism," she said.

Juana Castro was considered firmly in the anti-Castro camp almost from the beginning. Another staunch anti-Red is her sister Emma, already living in Mexico. A half-brother of Fidel—Pedro Emilio Castro Argota—also is believed to be anti-Communist. His whereabouts are uncertain. Other close Castro kin remain in Cuba.

In a prepared statement when she arrived yesterday, Miss Castro, her voice filled with emotion and visibly nervous, told a tale of terror and of a "dictatorship of fear" under which her country is living today.

She warned Latin America to beware "of what awaits them" if the Latin nations do not take steps now to halt the "insidious campaign of sabotage and Communist subversion" which her brother is carrying out throughout the continent.

She said one section of the State Security Department was dedicated solely to espionage and guerrilla activities throughout the American continent.

"Cuban diplomatic pouches . . . carry instructions for Communist agents, as well as arms and propaganda . . . Cuban embassies in Latin America are nests of subverison and espionage . . ."

Miss Castro compared Cuba's Army intelligence to "the worst elements of Hilter's Gestapo . . . terror and panic exist . . ."

She said there was a widespread awareness in Cuba of her brother's betrayal of the revolution. "Many persons . . . in the government and the Army . . . are not with the government but dare not say so for fear of being betrayed . . ."

Charges Betrayal

Almost breaking into tears at one point, Castro's sister said, "I find it most difficult to speak against members of my family, even Fidel. But he has betrayed the Cuban revolution which so many of us lived and died for."

At no time did she permit newsmen to ask questions. A spokesman said, "Miss Castro fears for her life. She wishes to contain herself to only those statements which she has prepared."

She then spoke of her brother and his broken promises. Bitterness crept into her voice when she related how he had betrayed the revolution of 1959.

"Fidel told us he fought in the mountains to free his country of the terrible dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. But we soon discovered that everything Fidel had told us, had promised us, were lies.

"He declared himself to be a follower of Marx and Lenin and we know then that we had been betrayed."

75,000 in Jails

Her brothers hold prisoner some 75,000 political opponents, Miss Castro charged. She denounced the regime's treatment of the Roman Catholic Church. Her brothers did not ban it, she said, because they feared adverse reaction abroad, but all who attended services were blacklisted as enemies of the regime.

"I once took part in a religious procession," she continued. "We were attacked by my brother's henchmen. I saw the boy carrying the banner of the Virgin of Charity beaten to death by these men."

Referring to the "reign of terror" and the "brutal dictatorship" of her broher, Miss Castro said that in Cuba today "sons have been turned against fathers" and that there is "fear and terror in the streets of the cities and throughout the country."

"Please save Cuba," she pleaded. "My fervent wish and that of all freedom loving Cubans is that the forthcoming conference of the Organization of American States will take definite steps against the dictatorial regime of Cuba."

[Quick reaction to Miss Castro's defection came from Congressman Paul Rogers. The Florida Democrat, describing it as a great moral victory for the United States, urged in Washington that the United States invite her to tour America and see democracy at work. Then she could tell Latin America the contrast between freedom and the regime that exists in Cuba.]

Associated Press

Juanita Castro, eldest sister of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, weeps during a news conference in Mexico City at which she attacked her brother's regime.